**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

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News Release

TASK FORCE MAKES RECORD METH SEIZURE
22 pounds of "meth" valued at over $430,000 seized

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. — A drug enforcement task force here seized 22 pounds of methamphetamine yesterday which removed more than one million dosage units from the streets, and arrested the driver.

This arrest and seizure were announced by: U.S. Attorney Bill Leone, District of Colorado; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent in Charge (SAC) Jeffrey Copp; Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Denver Field Division SAC Jeffrey D. Sweetin; Mesa County Sheriff Stan Hilkey; and Grand Junction Police Chief Greg Morrison.

Investigators assigned to the DEA High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force arrested Rafael Alvarez-Ibarra.

A Task Force Officer stopped a Chrysler Town and Country van traveling east on Interstate 70 in Mesa County. The driver, Rafael Alvarez-Ibarra gave the Task Force Officer permission to search the van. The Task Force Officer's canine gave a positive alert for the presence of drugs. The subsequent search led to the discovery of a false compartment behind the firewall of the van. Located in the false compartment were 20 individually plastic-wrapped packages containing about 22 pounds of methamphetamine or "meth," which has a $430,000 street value. Task Force members described the meth as "ice" due to the glass shard-like appearance. "Ice" is defined by being more than 90 percent pure.

"We're fortunate to be part of an extremely effective drug-enforcement task force with DEA," said Jeffrey Copp, ICE Denver special agent-in-charge. "These law enforcement partnerships are the best way to deal with the insidious nature of illegal drugs and drug smugglers." Copp oversees a four-state area for the ICE Office of Investigations, which includes: Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Idaho.

SAC Jeffrey D. Sweetin stated, "The Mesa County Sheriff's Office and the Grand Junction Police have clearly demonstrated their commitment to drug law enforcement. Task Forces operate locally, but no drug trafficking organization is local. Drug dealers take advantage of jurisdictional restrictions and are arrogant enough to think that they can move drugs up and down our highways with impunity. It takes a keen leader and a committed community to recognize the long term benefit of joining other law enforcement agencies like DEA and ICE in the battle against meth."

"We cannot afford to allow this highly destructive drug to continue to infiltrate and destroy the basic premise of a healthy society. We are thrilled that approximately 22 lbs. of methamphetamine will not be delivered into the hands of these criminals who have no consideration for the destructive impact this drug has on our community.", stated Sheriff Stan Hilkey, Mesa County Sheriff's Office.

Grand Junction Chief of Police Greg Morrison summed it up saying, "22 pounds of meth are off the street because of the Task Force. This is a huge seizure made possible by good police work. Our efforts really paid off this time."

Federal charges are pending. The defendant could be charged by complaint with Possession with Intent to Distribute methamphetamine. If convicted, the penalty is not less than 10 years and no more than life imprisonment; $4,000,000 fine or both; no less than five years supervised release; and a $100 special assessment fee. Rafael Alvarez-Ibarra's initial appearance is scheduled for Monday, Aug. 29 in Grand Junction, Colo.

The HIDTA Task Force is comprised of DEA, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Mesa County Sheriff's Office and the Grand Junction Police Department.

The charges are only allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless or until proven guilty.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.